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United States Department of State

Washington, D. C. 20520

June 21, 1994

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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM  
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RELEASED IN FULL

TO: The Acting Secretary

FROM: INR - Toby T. Gati

SUBJECT: French Intervention in Rwanda

TVG: R

France is preparing to intervene in Rwanda. The operation, under UN auspices if the Security Council directs, is also being coordinated with the WEU. France has pledged 1,000 troops, drawn primarily from forces already in Africa, and is looking for additional troops from other countries to create a force of about 2,000. The operation could save many lives still threatened by Hutu militias, especially in the southwest. The Rwandan opposition (RPF), suspicious that France wants to keep the interim government in power, has denounced the intervention.

Pushed by domestic media criticism, humanitarian concerns, and the failure of the UN and the OAU to act, France announced on June 15 that it would intervene in Rwanda to protect civilians should the killing continue if at least one other European state would participate. At that stage, France had not consulted with the UN Security Council or potential troop donors. Italy then called for an urgent meeting of the Western European Union, which was held Friday. Meanwhile, France had begun discussing the issue with WEU and UN Security Council members. France told the WEU that it was ready to dispatch troops; the Italians were willing to consider the possibilities while other WEU members made no immediate pledges. The WEU Council is to meet again on Tuesday, June 21. Its Secretary-General, Van Eekelen, said that WEU would coordinate but not command the operation, which would have to have UN approval. On Monday June 20, France introduced a resolution in the Security Council authorizing UN intervention under Chapter VII.

Plans and partners. The French envisage a relatively brief operation with a reinforced battalion of perhaps 2000 troops to protect civilians -- not to act as an interposition force -- until the UN can organize a full-scale peacekeeping operation. The French are still developing their operational plans and longer term political objectives as they seek, via the WEU, to enlist other Europeans and to attract Africans. Belgium, which in April withdrew its 450 UNAMIR peacekeepers from Rwanda after eleven were slain, has announced it will not send troops but has

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promised logistical support. Britain is sending trucks (without drivers); Germany's constitutional issues remain before the courts and the chance of open combat would discourage the Germans in any event. Italy, which last week appeared ready to send troops, has since indicated it would take part only if other WEU allies joined.

Military options. Most, if not all, of the French troops would have to be drawn from garrisons already stationed in Africa. France maintains some 1,100 troops in the Central African Republic and they would probably provide the bulk of a Rwandan intervention force. The remainder of the initial force would likely be drawn from the 2,700 French troops in Djibouti or units in France.

The French currently expect to airlift their troops into eastern Zaire and deploy overland to western Rwanda; they do not plan to extend the operation as far as Kigali. A move into northwestern Rwanda, which is controlled by interim government forces and populated mainly by hard-line Hutus, would widely be seen as favoring these elements, especially if, as is feared, few Tutsis remain alive in the area. A quick deployment into southwest Rwanda, where many Tutsis have lived, could save thousands of surviving Tutsis and moderate Hutus threatened by Hutu militias.

Rwandan reactions. The interim government would welcome the intervention. The Tutsi RPF, on the other hand, quickly and predictably denounced the proposal. RPF Commander Kagame said the French could only aggravate the situation and accused them of supporting the interim government. The RPF is concerned that the presence of large numbers of foreign troops -- whether or not under UN control -- would limit its military and political options.

The RPF is not currently in a position to make good on its threats to oppose the French militarily; RPF and French forces would initially be separated by a distance of some 30 kilometers in the northwest and over 100 kilometers in the southwest. The RPF is unlikely to make a rapid advance into the northwest, while French and allied forces would almost certainly try to avoid confrontation with the RPF as they gradually move into the interior. Fears that French intervention might lead to a cease-fire in place are likely to cause the RPF to step up its efforts to take Kigali quickly.

Other African views. The reactions of Rwanda's neighbors will vary. Zairian President Mobutu welcomed the French proposal and would approve a French troop insertion through Zaire. Uganda, which continues to back the RPF with weapons and matériel, deeply distrusts the French. But opposition to the French move is likely to be muted because President Museveni is

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sensitive to criticisms of his support for the rebels, which he denies.

Burundi probably would not permit the French to deploy into Rwanda from its territory, given its stated reluctance to allow any UN troops to deploy from Burundi and concern that a French presence might exacerbate its own Hutu-Tutsi tensions. The Tutsi-dominated Burundian military likely shares Tutsi RPF concern over French intentions. Tanzania will not oppose the intervention. ~~Senegal has committed troops to a French-led force, and Mitterrand stated June 18 that "two or three" African states were willing to join.~~

Although the OAU has not taken an official position, an OAU official in Washington on June 17 criticized France, saying any military intervention should come only in conjunction with the expanded UNAMIR operation and in consultations with the OAU.

The French intervention, 1990-93. France intervened decisively in Rwanda in October 1990, three days after the RPF's surprise invasion from Uganda, by flying in 300 paratroops from the Central African Republic. France acted to protect some 600 French citizens in Rwanda. Deployed at Kigali airport and at strategic installations in and around the city, French troops also protected President Habyarimana -- a friend of Mitterrand's -- and gave the Rwandan government army the confidence to avoid collapse despite early reverses.

French troops stayed more than three years, though they were reduced to 150 advisors and trainers in 1991. RPF spokesmen frequently accused the French of participating in counterinsurgency operations with government troops and providing artillery support. France also played an active political role behind the scenes in 1990-92, pressing Habyarimana, with mixed success, to broaden his government. Its political role became less obvious after the Arusha peace talks between Habyarimana and the RPF began in mid-1992, but Paris supported the peace process. The French saved the regime again in February 1993 by boosting their presence to 600 troops after a new RPF offensive. On December 13, 1993, four months after the Arusha peace accord was reached, the French troops were replaced by the UNAMIR force.

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